A Worked Sandhill Crane Beak and Mandible from the Richards Site, Muskingum County, Ohio

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Feature 280, a refuse pit excavated by Jeff Carskadden and Jim Morton at the Richards Site, a Late Prehistoric Philo Phase village site along the Muskingum River, south of Zanesville (Carskadden and Morton 1977) has yielded the first evidence of the Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis tabida*) from a prehistoric site in the Muskingum Valley.

Goslin (1952: 21) has reported remains of the Sandhill Crane from the Cramer Site, Ross County as well as from the Feurt Site, Scioto County (Goslin 1950: 19), while Parmalee and Shane (1970: 197) record its presence at Blain Village, Ross County. I find no other published references to prehistoric occurrences of *Grus canadensis tabida* in Ohio. Wetmore (1943: 127) describes some of Goslin's avian material from the Feurt Site as representative of the Little Brown Crane, *Grus canadensis canadensis,* based upon the small size, but these two varieties are generally not distinguished.

Dawson (1903: 461-462) reports the species as breeding in northern Ohio, particularly in the area of Huron Co. Trautman and Trautman (1968: 270) state that the last nesting occurrence for this bird in the state of Ohio was reported in 1926. Today it is rare in occurrence, though migratory flocks may be composed of numerous individuals (Thomson 1983: 189). Other occurrences listed by Thomson (since 1950) are limited to central and western Ohio (Delaware, Madison, Ross, Logan Counties). It is unclear how far east the original distribution of this bird extended, though migratory or transient occurrences have been noted as far east as New England. Zeisberger (*vide* Mahr 1949) reports the "crane" in the Muskingum Valley but it is doubtful that he referred specifically to the Sandhill Crane. The paucity or absence of records of the Sandhill Crane in Eastern Ohio makes the present occurrence of all the more interest.

The remains consist of a beak that has been cut transversely across the symphysis between the nasal and frontal bones. Cut marks just behind the external nares, on both the top and the sides of the beak, may be associated with removal of the beak or—more likely—with skinning. Deep cuts on the upper and outer sides of the left jugal, however, are clearly related to removal of the beak from the skull.

The mandible, which appears to belong to the same individual, has a hole completely drilled through both the left and right side, near the posterior ends. Two additional sets of holes were attempted at about 25 and 50 mm from the top of the beak on the left side and at about 40 and 55 mm from the tip of the beak on the right side. The offset between these incompletely drilled holes is probably the reason they were not finished.

The function of this worked mandible and beak remains unknown. Although some religious significance might be inferred, the beak and mandible may as easily have served simply as an ornamental item. They were found in the base of a refuse pit, in association with the other bone artifacts shown in Figure 3: an antler tine with deliberately flattened, chisel-like distal end; a cut and drilled elk phalange III; a birdbone bead, probably made from a section of turkey tibiotarsus; a bipointed bone pin or awl; and a nicely made bone hairpin with a flat, feather-shaped expansion at one end. All of these items, except for the Sandhill Crane mandible and beak, have been burned or fire-blackened to a considerable degree. It is possible that such burning was deliberate, and it may have been part of a ritual or symbolic act associated with the individual to whom these artifacts belonged. Carskadden (pers. comm.) has suggested that the peculiar pattern of fire-blackening on the hairpin may have been a deliberate attempt to mimic coloration on a bird feather. This idea has some merit, for a similar pattern occurs on the feathers of some gulls and, no doubt, on other birds.

The fact that the Sandhill Crane beak and mandible exhibit no signs of burning may indicate that their inclusion in the refuse pit is entirely unrelated to the presence of the burned artifacts, although all were found together in the bottom of the refuse pit.

The presence in another refuse pit of another identified Sandhill Crane bone, a complete right humerus with cut marks near the proximal end, suggests that the Sandhill Crane is a definite, albeit rare, element in the Richards archaeofauna.

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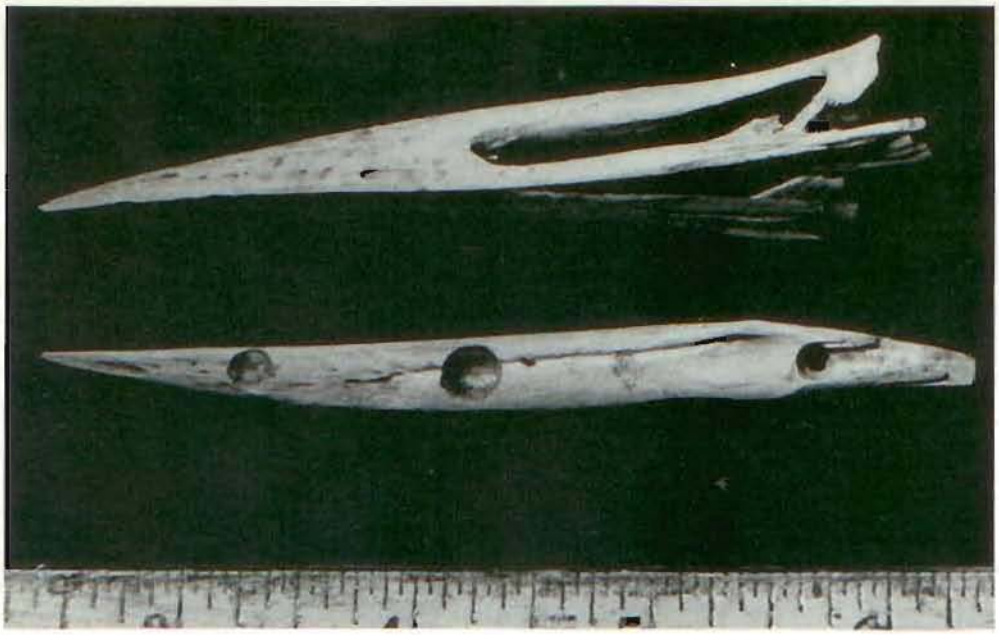

Fig. 1. Cut Sand Hill Crane beak and drilled mandible. Left side. View of beak slightly oblique.

Fig. 2. View of right side of Sand Hill Crane mandible. Upside down to facilitate comparison of placement of partially drilled holes with those on left side of mandible.

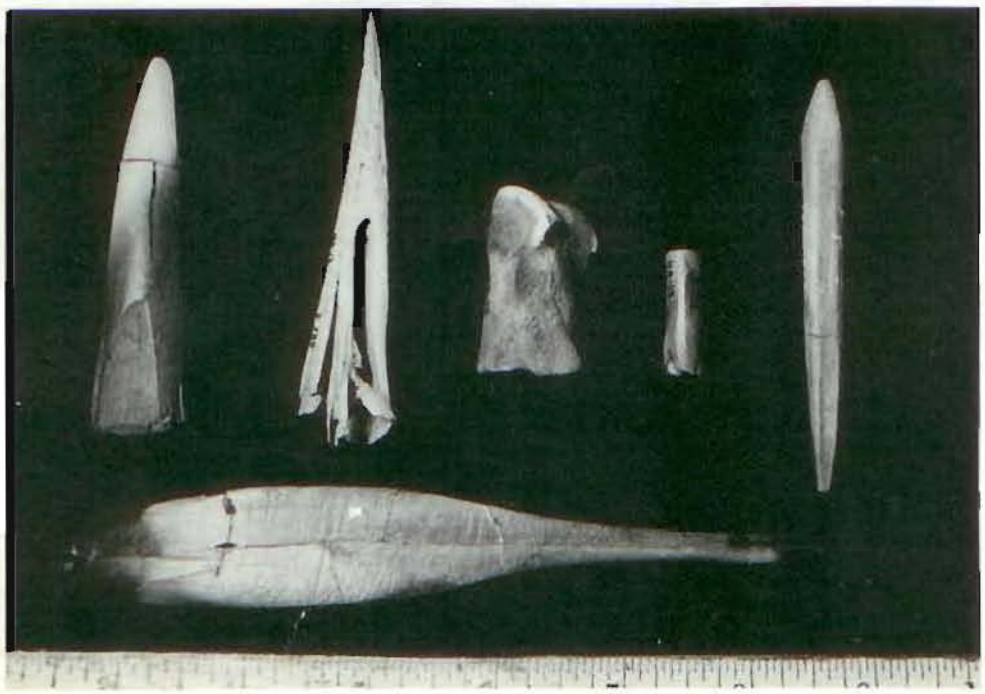

Fig. 3. Artifacts associated with the worked beak and mandible. Top row: Antler tine with chisel edge; Sand Hill Crane beak; drilled elk phalange; bird bone bead; bipointed pin or awl. Bottom Row: Hairpin. Scale in inches.